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TEMPERATURES IN PARKED CARS POSE DEADLY RISK FOR CHILDREN

(RICHMOND, Va.)—As you pack the car for that Independence Day trip, remember that the temperature inside a car parked in direct sunlight can reach as high as 170 degrees in about 15 minutes. That's hotter than the highest temperature ever recorded in Death Valley or the Sahara Desert, the hottest places on Earth. At that temperature it takes only a matter of minutes for children to die or suffer permanent disability. According to preliminary findings from the state's chief medical examiner, 13 children died in Virginia from excessive heat between 1988 and 2003 as a result of being trapped or left in vehicles. They were all under 5 years of age.

Many of the vehicles involved in these tragic deaths had the common characteristics of being large vans or sport utility vehicles with tinted windows, which make it difficult to see a child inside. Another characteristic was that many of the vehicles had doors or trunks that were low to the ground, which gave curious children easy access to the vehicles' interiors.

"The message from these tragedies is that children should never be left unsupervised in or around cars," said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H.

If driving children to certain destinations is not part of your normal routine, do something to remind yourself they are in the car. Place a teddy bear or diaper bag on the front seat beside you. Or put your purse or briefcase in the backseat next to the child.

Other prevention tips include:

- Never leave your child unattended in a car even with the windows down.
- Always make sure that all children are out of the car.
- Always lock car doors and the trunk, even at home, and keep keys out of the reach of children.
- Keep fold-down seats upright to prevent children from crawling into the trunk.
- Never let children play in or around cars.
- Take immediate action if you see an unattended child in a car. Contact the parents or call 911 for help.

For more information on injury prevention visit the Virginia Department of Health's Division of Injury and Violence Prevention at www.vahealth.org/civp.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is one in a series of Summer Safety Week news releases calling attention to summertime risks. Read more VDH news at www.vdh.virginia.gov/news to learn other steps Virginians can take to protect their families.

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